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AUTHOR Thomas, Antoinette D.; Dudek, Stephanie Z.
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ABSTRACT

Interactions between husbands and wives are often assessed in terms of power distribution, based on decision-making outcomes. To examine the association of the dominance of "spouse" over "parents" and "peers" orientation with perceived behavioral and affective mutuality in the couple's financial management, couples (N=30) were randomly chosen from a list of couples meeting certain criteria found to affect conjugal power distribution. Subjects completed the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), the Inventory of Family Feelings (IFF), and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, devised behavioral and affective scales of financial management. Correlations between perceived high mutuality in the couple's financial management and dominance of "spouse" over "parents" orientation was significant on the TAT but not on the IFF; "peers" orientation was significant on both scales. The results suggest that a personality attribute may be considered as one of the bases of conjugal power structure. Additionally, the level of maturity in interpersonal relations may determine if a partner would "want" to have more power or if he or she would rather do things jointly with his/her partner, no matter what resources exist. (Author/KMF)

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DOMINANCE OF SPOUSE ORIENTATION AND PERCEIVED COUPLE MUTUALITY

Antoinette D. Thomas

Stephanie Z. Dudek

Mount Saint Vincent University
Nova Scotia, Canada

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DOMINANCE OF SPOUSE ORIENTATION AND PERCEIVED COUPLE MUTUALITY[1]

Antoinette D. Thomas* and Stephanie Z. Dudek**

Individuals choices of the most significant person in their lives, follow a developmental line. These choices proceed from parents to peers and then to a person from the opposite sex. This notion was supported by theoretical (Blood, 1969; Erikson, 1959; Fairbairn, 1946, 1952; Sullivan, 1953) and empirical (Floyd and South, 1972; Walshe et al. 1976) findings.

An inverse relation between closeness to extended family and friends versus spouse has also been empirically supported (Bott, 1957; Burgess et al. 1963; Goodrich et al. 1968). It was hypothesized that mature married people consider their spouses as more important than their parents or friends.

The "dominant orientational other" could be an index of a personality attribute. Orientational others are significant persons in transe-role sense (Kuhn, 1964). This dependent variable, is defined as: "the significant other toward whom more positive than negative feelings are directed and who exceed in this respect all other significant others, in a transe-role sense."

Interaction between husband and wife was often assessed in

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*Assistant Professor, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

**Professor, University of Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

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terms of power distribution, based on decision-making outcomes. The powerful partner is the one who has "more". This may be socioeconomic resources (Blood and Wolfe, 1960), resources in cultural context (Rodman, 1967, 1972) rewards with least costs (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959) or influence on the other partner's decisions (Dahl, 1957). It may also be the one who has "less" interest in the relation (Waller, 1938) or love for the partner (Safilios Rothschild, 1976). These studies do not explain "why" some marriage partners would "want" to be more powerful than their spouses. While others would rather do things jointly or tend to be independent.

Mutuality, as a concept indicating mature relating. It incorporates: equal power, sharing, togetherness and mutual dependence. Financial management was chosen as one aspect of the couple's life. Its dimensions were: ownership, decision-making outcomes, conflict resolution, togetherness, mutual dependence and equal power. Mutuality in financial management was the second dependent variable. The main hypothesis was: dominance of "spouse" over "parents" and "peers" orientation is associated with perceived behavioral and affective mutuality, in the couple's financial management.

Method

Subjects

Possible intervening demographic-background variables, which previous studies have found influential on conjugal power distribution, were controlled as independent variables. Some are included in the selection criteria. Subjects come from the so-called normal population.

Selection criteria: (1) No psychiatric hospitalization or marriage counselling, (2) Having school age children, (3) Protestants or Catholics, (4) Caucasian Canadians, (5) First marriage, (6) High school education or above, (7) Both spouses work.

A potential group of 57 couples was selected as a restricted sample, from which a random sample was taken by means of random numbers tables. Thirty couples agreed to participate out of the contacted 43 couples.

Testing Material

Each of the two dependent variables, orientational others and mutual financial management (MFM) was studied by different procedures, to eliminate contamination between data attributed to each variable. The first was evaluated by the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) and the Inventory of Family Feelings (IFF). The second was assessed by a semi-structured interview.

1. a) The TAT

Seven cards of the TAT were chosen which allow equal chances for "parents", "peers" and "spouse" themes. A devised scoring technique was used. It avoided usual expansion and allowed comparison, by providing a fixed framework of three operationally defined interpersonal categories. The scoring system dealt with the manifest content. An affective score ranging from +2 for strong positive themes to -2 for strong negative themes was based on: (i) the quality of the interpersonal relation, and (ii) frequent responses in previous studies and stimulus-pull characteristics. A scoring guide was made. Reliability: test-retest and interscorer correlations ranged from .88 to .97 on affective

scores and 86% to 98% agreement on orientational others categories.

b) The IFF, a research tool, assesses interpersonal affect. Reported reliabilities are .97 and .98 as well as high discriminative validity.

2. The Semi-Structured Interview, included 2 scales: the first one, the Financial Behavior Scale (FBS), investigated subjects-reported life experiences. It consisted of 3 measures: (a) Joint Ownership of Income and Assets, as an introduced measure. Scoring categories were all joint, some joint and non joint; (b) Joint Decision-Making consisted of 6 previously used items, with balanced representation between husband and wife. Only equal decisions were scored (Pratt, 1976). This procedure avoided two serious confusions in previous studies: (i) balanced scores resulting from high and low power scores were considered same as equal scores, when none of them was (Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Cromwell et al. 1973; Meyer and Lewis, 1976; Kandel and Lesser, 1972; Safilios-Rothschild, 1967, 1969, 1970, 1976) and (ii) the cut off points assigned to the equalitarian sphere which did not respect the arithmetic range of 2.5 to 3.4 for the equal score of 3 (Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Turk and Bell, 1972); (c) Equality in Disagreement in Decision Making, a modified conflict resolution measure, dealt with cases of disagreements posed by the respondent as well as the spouse, in minor and major decisions.

The second scale was the Financial Affective Scale (FAS). It consisted of three measures of the respondent's feelings about the whole pattern in the couple's life. The subject was asked to check as many statements as applicable. Negative statements were offered twice as often as positive ones. The three measures were: (a) Togetherness: doing things together versus spouse has more control than desired

and spouse avoids decisions; (b) Mutual Dependence: perceived two-way dependence versus one way dependence, feelings of restriction by partners and feelings of independence similar to pre-marriage phase. Both of these measures were devised and (c) Equal Power, a modified measure of general power, dealing with equal versus more or less power.

The following procedures were used to increase confidence in the MFM measures: (a) Inter-scorer reliability: Pearson correlations ranged from .73 to .95 on two measures, the other 4 allowed no disagreement between scores, (b) Test-retest correlations ranged from .81 to .90; (c) The content was examined by three experienced judges, and (d) Respondents report on changes in investigated areas, 95% reported established patterns.

3. The last test was the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976), a research tool. It was used as a measure of the non-pathological characteristic of the sample. Reported reliability was .96 as well as high construct and discriminative validity. The sample was comparable to the normative "married" group.

Procedure

Husbands and wives were separately interviewed, mostly in their homes, for about two hours each. The TAT preceded the Financial Scales, then the IFF followed by the DAS.

Results

Dominance of Spouse Orientation was associated with perceived mutuality in the couple's financial management. The main hypothesis was supported, six out of eight by sub-hypothesis were supported. A

more demanding null hypotheses was used to compute the expected frequencies in the use of Chi^2. The resulting tables had two degrees of freedom instead of one. Since no restrictions were made on rows which were determined by the frequency of high and low scores obtained on financial management scales.

TAT

Spouse > Parents		Spouse > Peers	
FBS	FAS	FBS	FAS
$x^2 = 8.36$	$x^2 = 17.86$	$x^2 = 23.08$	$x^2 = 23$
$p = .02$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$

Married people who were relatively more attached to their spouses than to their parents or friends, were significantly more likely to report and feel that they manage their finances on a mutual basis with their spouses. Such attachment and positive feelings were not directly expressed to given important persons in the respondents lives, but rather on a less conscious level. It is believed to be reflecting what the respondent may not know or want to tell about his interpersonal relations.

IFF

Spouse > Parents		Spouse > Peers	
FBS	FAS	FBS	FAS
$x^2 = 3.78$	$x^2 = 4.34$	$x^2 = 16.56$	$x^2 = 15.54$
		$p < .001$	$p < .001$

Those who reported high sharing, equality, togetherness and mutual dependence, with their spouses, might not be significantly more attached to their respective spouses than to their parents. Positive feelings

and attachment are expressed here to actual persons. However, respondents who reported and judged that mutuality is the basis of financial management with their spouses, were significantly more consciously attached to their spouses than to their best friend, be it same or opposite sex.

DISCUSSION

These results indicate that a personality attribute could be considered as one of the basis of conjugal power structure. The level of maturity in interpersonal relations could determine if a partner would "want" to call on any of his "resources" to have more power or if he would rather do things jointly with his partner, no matter what resources he may have.

It could be argued that perceived mutuality in financial management is directly related to the following characteristics in interpersonal relations: in the first place, a developmental readiness to be attached to the spouse more than to parents or casual cross-sex friends. Secondly, positive feelings toward the spouse might not be basically stronger than conscious feelings to parents. Thirdly, attachment and positive feelings for spouse are stronger than one's best friend or love relations, whether in reality or fantasy.

These results support theoretical and empirical studies on the inverse relationship between conjugal closeness and closeness to kin and friends. They are congruent with family studies in which conjugal closeness was found to be associated with intimacy, involvement, and joint roles whereas closeness to kin and one's own friends was associated with disharmony, intimacy avoidance and segregated roles.

Another way to interpret these results, might be in terms of social learning theory. Children learn certain patterns of interaction which they tend to repeat when they have families of their own. It could be argued that mutuality can be learned more readily in democratic than in authoritarian families. Democratic parents are more likely to be expressive of their affections and more permissive of their children's freedom to separate from them.

In addition to low mutuality in conjugal life, individuals who have not matured in interpersonal relations, who are parents or peers oriented, are likely to have chosen their spouses as parents substitutes or "room mates", each managing his own affairs.